

Moscow and Lithuanians Stand Firm

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MOSCOW, March 20 — A nervous standoff continued today between the Kremlin and Lithuania, with separatist officials making a show of inviting volunteers to sign up for a future Lithuanian "territorial defense system" and Russians living in the Lithuanian capital responding with their own vigilante program.

No developments were reported on the critical question of talks between officials of the central Government and Lithuania over Lithuania's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union.

In Lithuania, the separatist-controlled Parliament passed legislation to carry forward independence, including preparations for formally marking national borders.

The Soviet authorities set aside a half-hour of prime television time this evening to broadcast an elaborate report on a rally Sunday in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, by opponents of independence, most of them Russians. The unusual show, intended to buttress the Kremlin's contention that the Lithuanian separatist move is illegal and harmful to the Soviet Union, showed a crowd in the tens of thousands.

Earlier coverage of the rally, broadcast to Lithuania by way of Leningrad television, had been disrupted by officials in Vilnius.

There was no immediate reaction from the Soviet Government to the White House caution to the Kremlin against increasing tension by staging military maneuvers and issuing statements described as "cause for concern." Kremlin officials have repeatedly renounced force as a means of solving the dispute.



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In Lithuania, Russians and Lithuanians took steps to form separate defense units.

On Monday, the Kremlin ordered its ministries to protect national industries in Lithuania and forbade negotiations with Lithuanian officials over transferring control of Soviet enterprises. President Vytautas Landsbergis responded by insisting that Lithuania already possesses all industry on its territory, by all the principles of international law.

The standoff is being closely followed by separatists in other Soviet republics, particularly Georgia, where the Popular Front has called for the postponement of republic elections scheduled for Sunday until the Communist Party's power monopoly has been stricken from the republic's constitution.

At the Kremlin, President Mikhail S.

Gorbachev met today with officials from Latvia, another Baltic state pressing for independence, the press agency Tass said. The agency said that at the meeting Mr. Gorbachev stressed the need for "practical work" to prepare the way for a new treaty defining the Soviet Union. Mr. Gorbachev has been talking of making limited changes in the existing national union to accommodate Baltic sovereignty demands.

In a meeting on Monday with separatist officials from Estonia, Mr. Gorbachev was quoted as emphasizing that Lithuania, in declaring its independence nine days ago and naming a national president, had chosen a road heading toward "a dead end," Estonian press reports said.

Mr. Gorbachev reportedly told the Estonians that "in the event of a divorce it is not important whether the marriage was contracted legally or not," the Estonian daily newspaper Paevaleht said. "The property must be divided nonetheless."

The notices about a future "territorial defense system" in Lithuania were being circulated by Sajudis, the major umbrella group for the independence movement.

"This is not something imminent," said Darius Cuplinskas, a spokesman for the Lithuanian Parliament, or Supreme Soviet, speaking from Vilnius. "They're just making a list of people who in the future might be willing to serve in such a unit. After all, we are planning the future of an independent country."

Soviet television reported that non-Lithuanian Russian speakers in Lithuania also were inviting volunteers to sign up to eventually guard community property.